
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1722 Swann Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Dupont Circle Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 26, 2022	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	22-276		Permit Review
		X	New Construction
			Demolition

StudioMB, on behalf of owner Lot Squared Development, proposes to infill a vacant lot with a new 3-story, 3-unit residential building. The lot is unusual in its setting in that the adjacent house at 1724 Swann Street has a deep setback that is unique on this row of Swann Street. The other houses on this block share the same front plane and are generally 3-story bayfront rowhouses or 2-story porch-front rowhouses.

Proposal

The concept design speaks to the unusual block face by aligning with 1720 on the east and notching out the front corner at the west, where 1724 is recessed. Its massing resembles a bay-front rowhouse and it is proposed to be constructed of brick. A rooftop penthouse is set back 16 feet from the front, 10 feet from the side, and 17 feet from the rear and is clad in a panel system. The penthouse opens onto a roof deck set back at the front, side and rear.

The windows are floor-to-ceiling openings in an irregular pattern on the façade and exposed side wall. Some of the windows feature butt glazing where they wrap the corners at the side wall and bay. Horizontal banding beneath and at the midpoint of the windows aligns with the adjacent row to the east and to the porch roof of 1724.

The entry is set into the notch above a metal stoop that has been extruded to cross the basement areaway. A basement stair descends from the edge of the sidewalk.

Evaluation

In 2017, the Board approved a concept for a new 3-story building with a penthouse set back from the front. In deference to the house at 1724, the proposed building sat about 8' back from the property line with a porch face aligned with the facade of 1720.

The Board found the concept generally compatible provided that the architect align the rear façade with that of 1720 Swann; the front stoop and basement stair relationship be studied further; and that the finish of the penthouse and the window and masonry details be developed. The Board also noted the historic concrete curb and historic iron fence in public space, which it requested be preserved as much as possible. Some of these conditions have been addressed through the current design and some can be repeated here.

Massing

Over the past several months, the architects have worked with HPO staff and the neighbors to determine a massing that addresses the streetscape appropriately. They explored the idea of a porch as was previously approved, but ultimately notched out the front corner as different, but also successful way to address the setback at 1724. This approach also moves the front entrance to the west to better reflect the rhythm of stoops along this street. The horizontal banding helps break down the building's scale and also responds to the treatment of properties to both the east and west. The HPO finds the massing of the building compatible with the property's unusual site condition and the historic district.

Roof Deck and Penthouse

The setback roof penthouse is an appropriate gesture to keep the height of the building down at the facade. However, the staff recommends that the cladding material be brick to match the rest of the building rather than drawing attention to itself with a different siding. Consideration should also be given to reducing the size of the penthouse, which could shift rearward where it is not required for head height in the stairwell and narrowed to the width of the stairs.

Similarly, the railing for the roof deck is a distracting visual element, which could be resolved by eliminating the narrow strip of deck in the front and narrowing the overall deck width, at least toward the front of the property. Alternately, a raised parapet could provide a railing, screening both the deck and part of the penthouse from view. It should be noted that because this is new construction, the HPO does not find that the penthouse needs to be fully invisible, but it should not be a visual distraction.

Windows

The staff recommends a rethinking of the fenestration with a design that better reflects the scale, proportion, and rhythm of windows on this block as well as the scale of the small house at 1724. While large opening sizes are approved in some new construction, those windows are usually broken down through thoughtful attention to pane configuration, muntin widths, and jamb/frame design and material, which should be further explored here.

Front Stoop

The configuration of the stoop is uncharacteristic of historic districts and HPO recommends re-examination of the design. Consideration must be given to a more traditionally sized landing and a basement stair that is as tucked in as possible or relocated inside. The stair should be masonry to relate to the block and eliminate visibility of the areaway at the side of the stoop. Meters must also be placed under the stoop, inside, or on the rear.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the character of the historic district with consideration of the comments above and delegate final approval to staff.

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